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**FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCE
THE CULMINATION OF TWO MAJOR INVESTIGATIONS REGARDING
THE INTERNATIONAL SHIPMENT OF EPHEDRINE AND
THE MANUFACTURE AND DISTRIBUTION OF METHAMPHETAMINE**

SACRAMENTO - United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today the culmination of two major investigations targeting the international shipment of ephedrine and the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine in the Eastern District of California and elsewhere.

In the first case, U.S. Attorney Scott and Gordon Taylor, the Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge of the Sacramento Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration, announced the unsealing of a four count indictment representing the culmination of a 17-month investigation which identified and dismantled an organization allegedly responsible for the shipment of thousands of pounds of ephedrine, a main precursor chemical used in the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine, from Canada to the United States. Including all of the arrests and searches in Canada and across the United States, the case resulted in a total of 54 arrests; the seizure of 80 pounds of methamphetamine; 2,620 pounds of ephedrine powder; 1.6 million ephedrine pills; two kilograms of cocaine; and \$3 million in Canadian currency.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Kymberly Smith, who is prosecuting the case in this District, the indictment in Sacramento charges the following individuals with conspiracy to import ephedrine, a crime which carries a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment and a fine up to \$250,000:

RICHIE MISHAL a/k/a Akram ABELLATIF, age 34, of Sacramento, California;
FAISAL RASHID, a/k/a "Sal," age 30, of Sacramento, California;
PAMELA MOLNER, age 34, of Florida;
HASUNI KAHWAJI, age 36, of Los Angeles California;
RODGER BRUNEAU, SR., age 42, of Canada;
HUGH STEVENS of Derby, New York; and
LOUIS RUSSO, age 36, of Batavia, New York.

MISHAL and RASHID are also charged with a conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamine, a charge which carries a mandatory minimum of ten years imprisonment and maximum of life imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$4,000,000. RASHID has two additional charges for possessing clandestine laboratory equipment, and for the possession of firearms in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

According to court documents previously filed in this case, the investigation led to the seizure in the Sacramento area of approximately 115 pounds of suspected ephedrine tablets, approximately 16 pounds of red phosphorus, and approximately 46 pounds of iodine crystals. Also seized were components for a methamphetamine manufacturing laboratory: two heating mantles, reaction flasks, beakers, power controllers, as well as two firearms including a Chinese SKS 7.62 caliber assault rifle and an Olympic Arms .223 caliber rifle.

In announcing the indictment, U.S. Attorney Scott stated, "The prosecution of meth manufacturers is a top priority for the United States Attorney's office because this drug has such a destructive effect on our communities. These two investigations demonstrate the commitment we have to work collaboratively to target this problem at every level: from the international suppliers of the precursor chemicals all the way down to the street level suppliers." DEA Deputy Administrator Michelle Leonhart added, "This should send a clear message to those who manufacture and traffic illegal drugs that you could be next."

The indictment was the culmination of an extensive investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration; United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Internal Revenue Service; Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Placer County Special Investigative Unit; California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement; Western El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team; Postal Inspection Service; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Assistance was also provided by the Placer County District Attorney's Office.

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In the second case, U.S. Attorney Scott; FBI Special Agent-in-Charge Keith Slotter; DEA Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge Gordon Taylor; IRS Supervisory Special Agent Steve Jensen, representing IRS Criminal Investigations; ICE Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge Rick Eaton; United States Marshal Antonio Amador; California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement Supervisory Special Agent Ester O'Keefe, representing BNE Chief John Gaines; Sacramento County Sheriff Lou Blanas; Sutter County Sheriff Jim Denney; Yuba City Chief Richard Doscher; Yuba County Sheriff Virginia Black; Marysville Chief of Police Bret Smith; and other local officials announced the unsealing of complaints and arrest warrants for thirty individuals, twenty-three of whom have been apprehended thus far, in three separate but related investigations, allegedly involved in the distribution of methamphetamine in the Sutter County, Yuba County, and Colusa County areas.

The first set of complaints allege crimes stemming from the large scale distribution of methamphetamine in the Eastern District of California, as well as the shipment of methamphetamine to Hawaii and Minnesota. According to Assistant United States Attorney Phillip A. Talbert, who is prosecuting the case, the complaints charge the following individuals with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, a charge which carries a mandatory minimum of ten years imprisonment and maximum of life imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$4,000,000.

MICHAEL AYALA, age 27, of Yuba City, California;
ANGEL GOMEZ, age 26, of Yuba City, California;
TYSON TROTTER, age 26 of Minneapolis, Minnesota;
ROGELIO ZUNIGA, age 22, of Stockton, California;
CHAIDEZ SAUL-GARCIA, age 22, of Stockton, California;
JUAN PABLO VELAZQUEZ, age 30, of Yuba City, California;
DELVIN BRIOSO, age 23 of Honolulu, Hawaii;
PANCHO NIEBLA ACEKA, age 25, Stockton, California;
BRANDY RABON, age 23, of Yuba City, California;
CASSANDRA MUNIZ, age 20, of Yuba City, California; and
BRADY MORSE, age 23, of Colusa, California.

The second set of complaints allege crimes stemming from the alleged large scale distribution of methamphetamine in the Eastern District of California. The following individuals are also charged with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, with a mandatory minimum of ten years imprisonment and maximum of life imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$4,000,000:

ADAN AYALA Jr., age 31, of Yuba City, California;
MACLOVIO ACOSTA, age 24, of Yuba City, California;
VICENTE OCADIO, age 28, of Yuba City, California;
OSCAR SANTANA, age 33, of Yuba City, California;
RANDALL GATH, age 51, of Magalia, California;
MARCALYN MORRIS, age 43, of Yuba City, California;
LEEANN SALAZAR, age 43, of Marysville, California; and
MARIA HERNANDEZ, age 28, of Yuba City, California.

In the third set of complaints, the following individuals are charged with a variety of crimes involving the distribution of methamphetamine on various dates between 2003 and 2004:

ARMANDO SOLIS, age 30, of Marysville, California;
CRUZ MORA, age 44, of Live Oak, California;
MARCOS MENDEZ, age 34, of Yuba City, California;
RAMON RAMIREZ, age 53, of Live Oak, California; and
OSBALDO RAMIREZ, age 23, of Live Oak, California.

Six additional defendants remain at large.

All three sets of complaints stem from a long-term federal, state, and local investigation headed by the DEA, the Sacramento HIDTA, the California Bureau of Narcotics NET-5 drug enforcement task force, and the Butte Inter-Agency Narcotics Task Force, with assistance from the United States Marshals Service.

It should be noted that the fact that the defendants herein have been charged with these crimes is merely an accusation, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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